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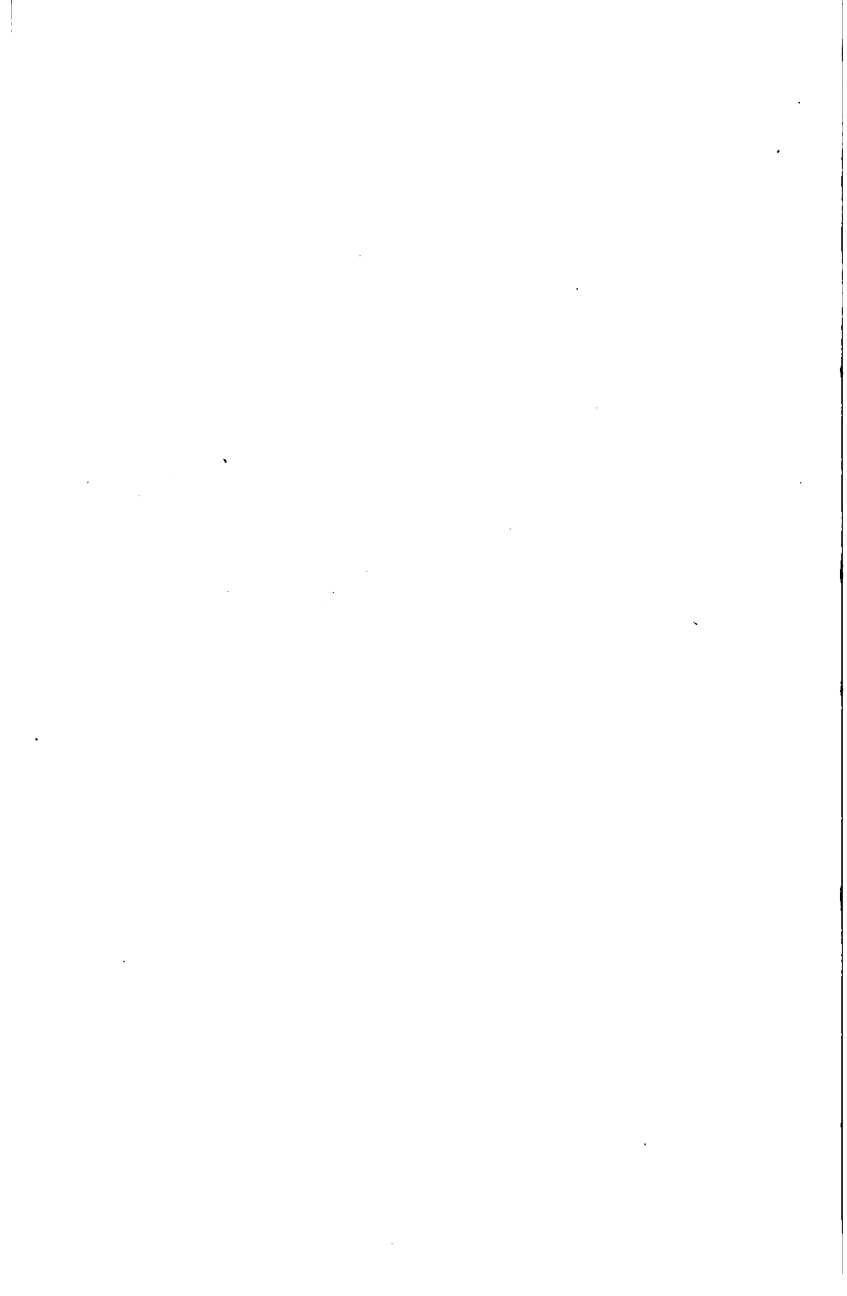
The Story of the
**LITTLE
ANGELS**

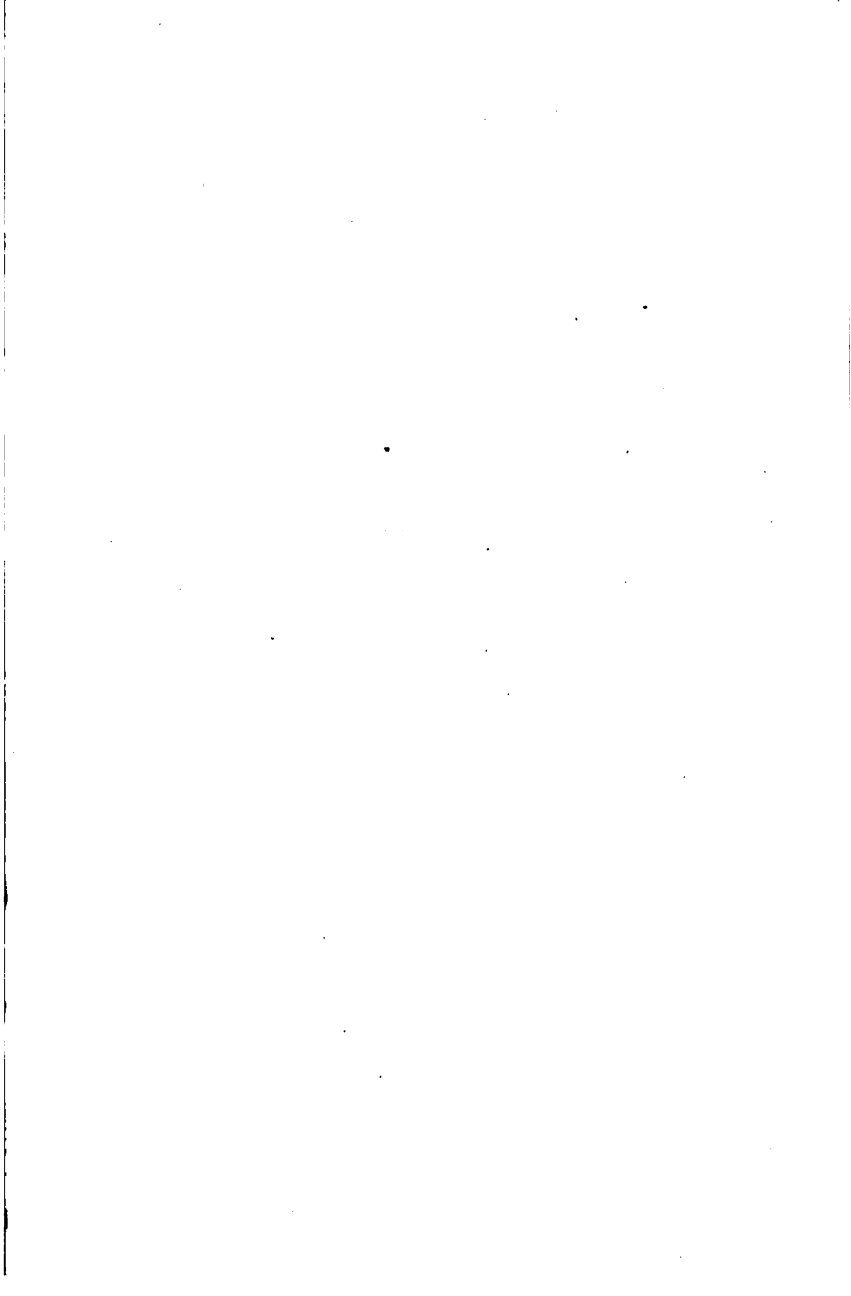


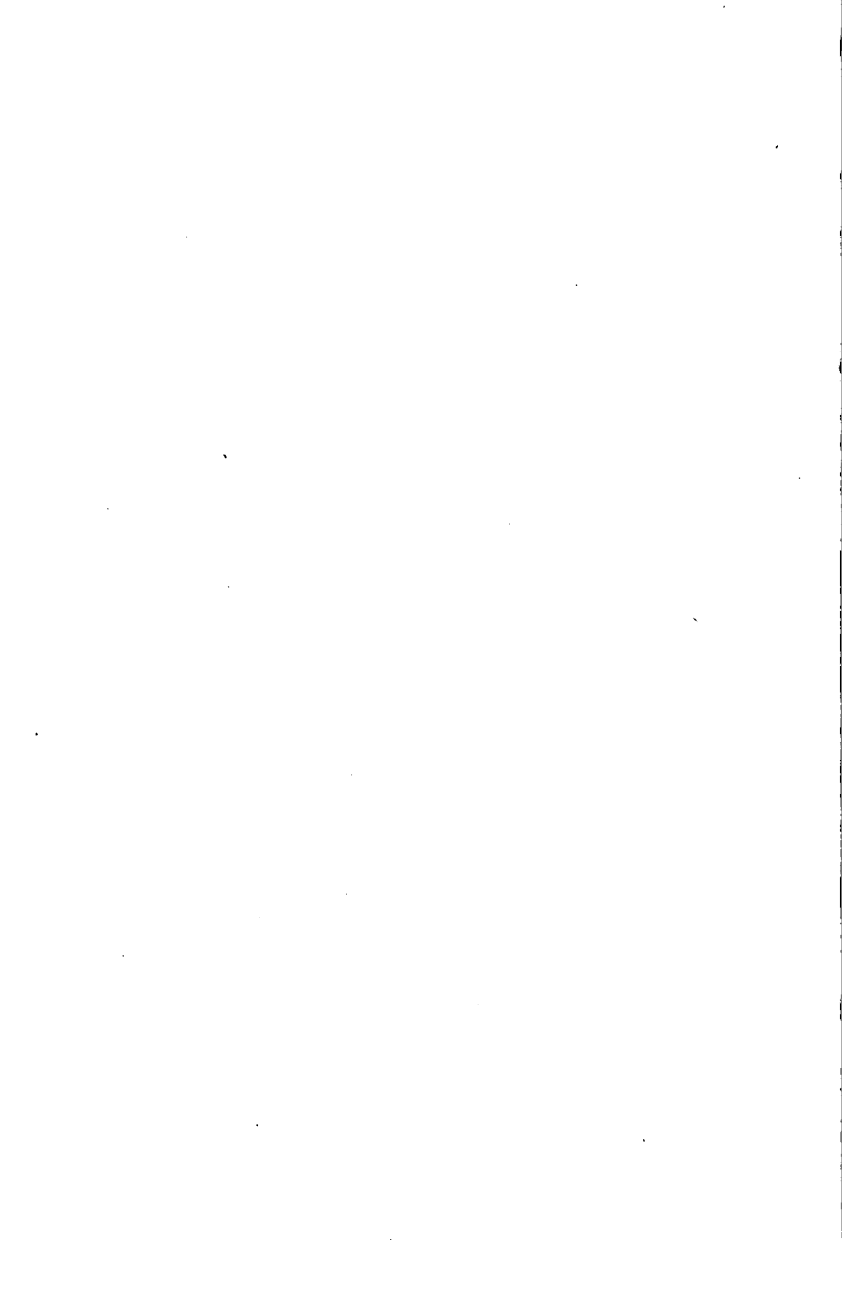
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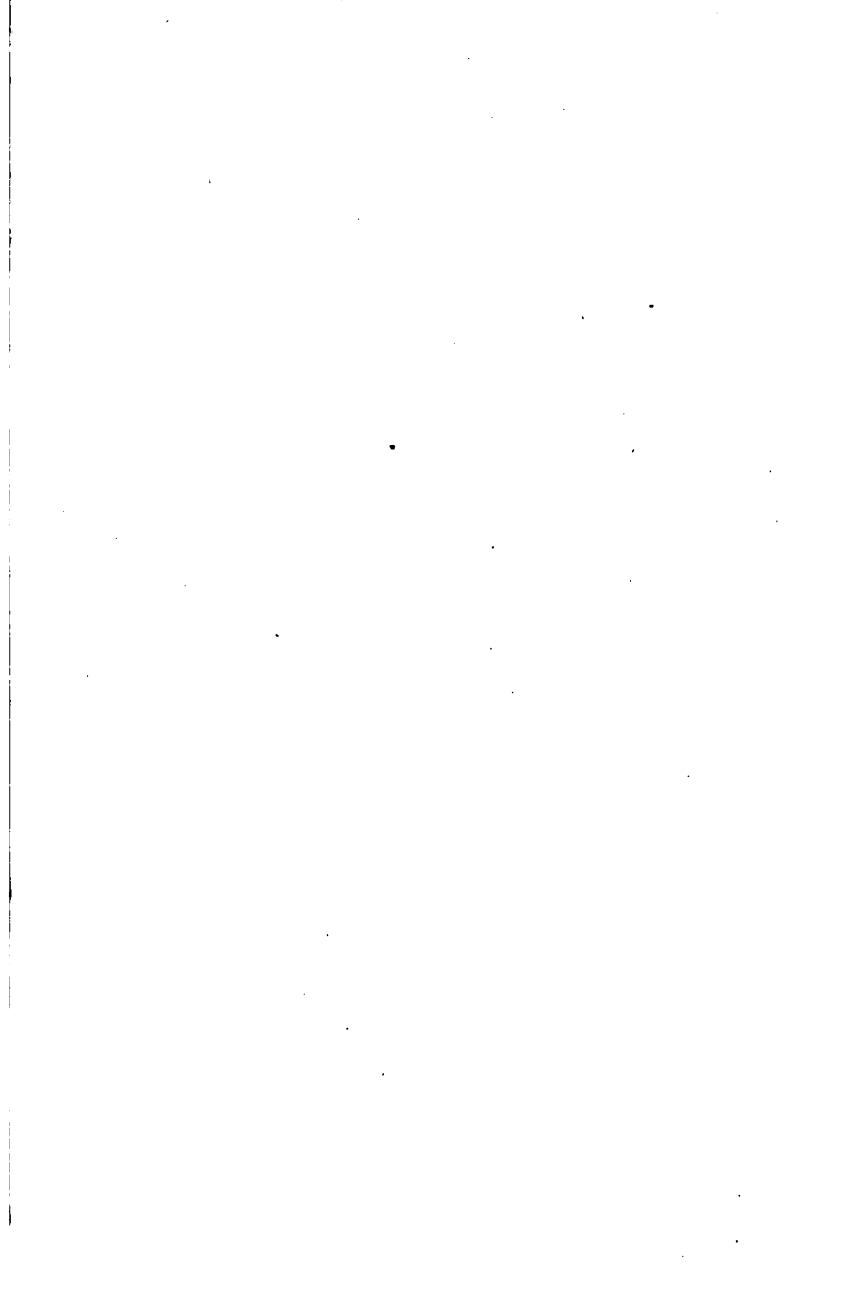


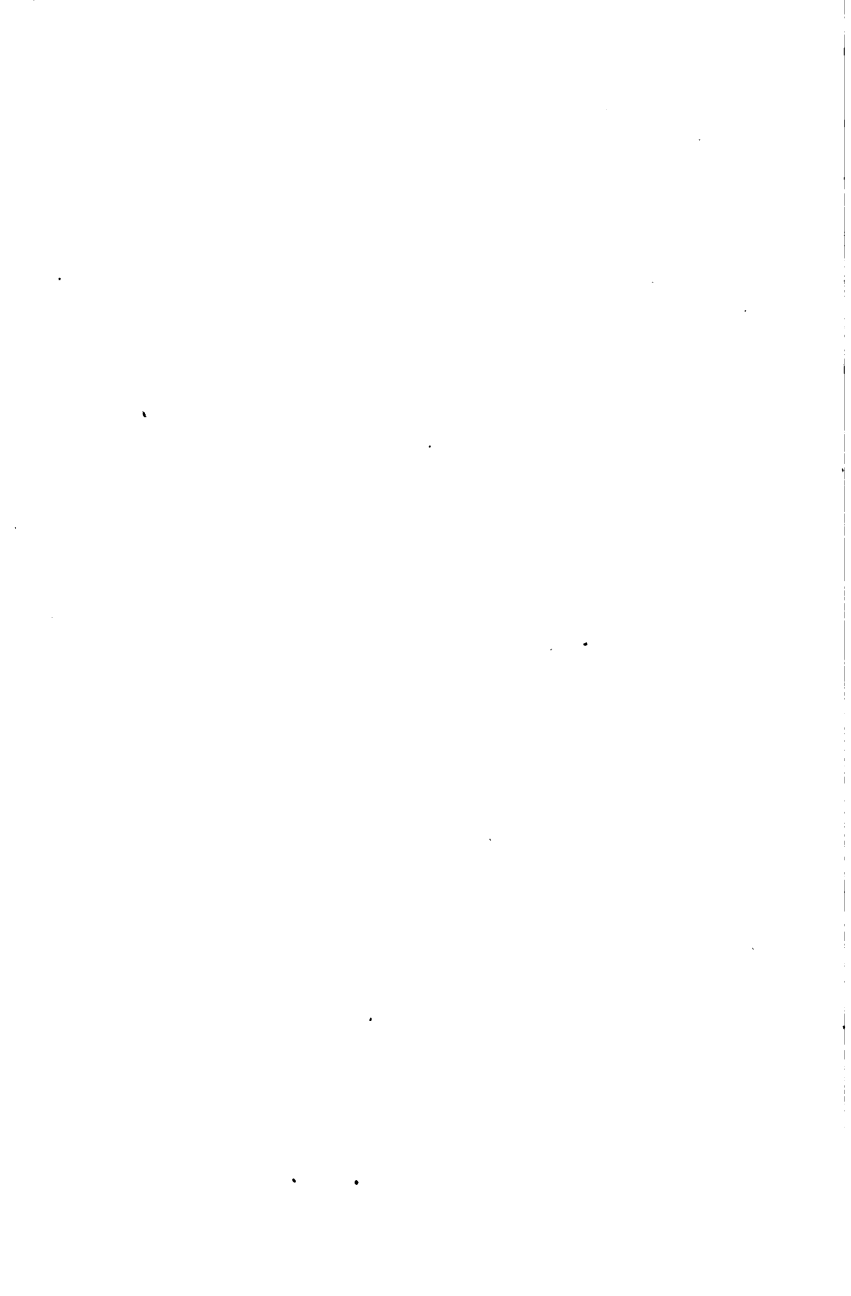
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THE STORY OF THE
LITTLE ANGELS

BY
LAURA SPENCER PORTOR

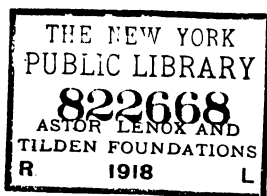


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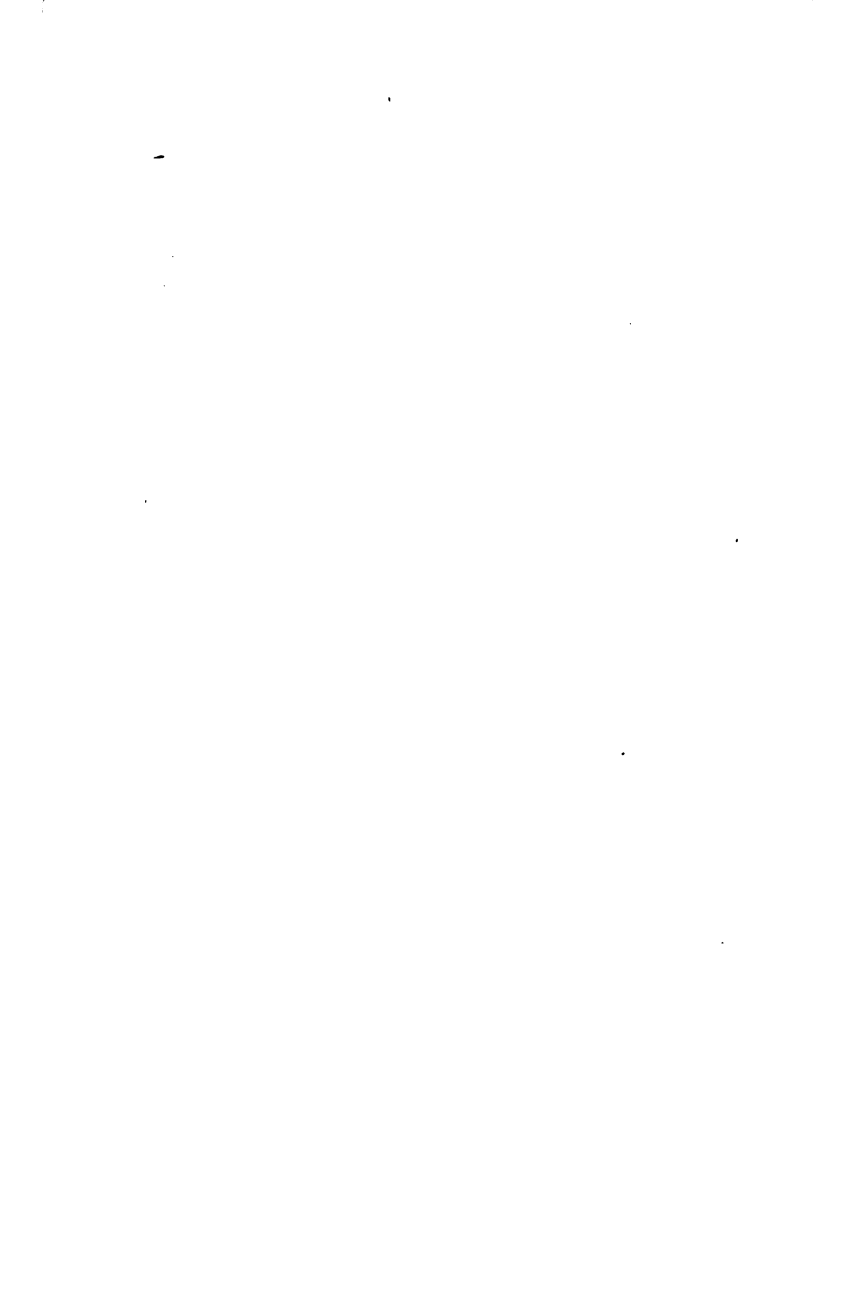
I-R

NOV 21 1917
JUL 21 1918
YAS 1918

A series of three horizontal rows of text, each row consisting of a series of dots forming the letters. The first row reads 'NOV 21 1917', the second 'JUL 21 1918', and the third 'YAS 1918'.

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TO
K. P. R.





THOUGH the little angels were not persuaded by what the older angels told them, yet they made an effort to be content. They tuned their little zitherns and xitoles and madolins; and they sang softly their little heavenly songs, and tried to be happy.



The Story of The Little Angels

I

*“And there was a company of the heavenly
host”*

WHEN I speak of the Christmas angels I do not mean the angels of the Nativity who announced Christ's birth to the shepherds. These angels we know well. Most of us have heard

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much of them, for the fame of them has been a long while with us. You have only to think how many times they have been pictured. It seems almost that the painters of old, when they had nothing else to do, must have said, "Come let us paint us the angels who announced Christ's birth to the shepherds." And forthwith they painted them with shining garments and rainbow wings, and white feet gliding over the earth, just escaping the soil of it. Or, if you have not seen these angels as the old masters loved to paint them, perhaps you will have pictured them often to yourself, as they came that night, long ago, over the waiting hills of Bethlehem, their voices sweet like music on the wind, and bringing with them their glad tidings of great joy. But beautiful, beautiful as these are, yet when I speak of the Christmas

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angels it is not these I have in mind, not these.

When I speak of the Christmas angels I mean rather those little angels, the really little angels, who are as many in heaven as little children are many on earth.

Now it chanced that a group of them, playing under the Tree of Life where it grows, and beside the Living Waters where they flow shining and beautiful, heard the grown-up angels talking of a great matter. They heard them talking of the birth of the Little Lord Christ upon earth, and of how the angels themselves were to announce the glad tidings to certain shepherds who lay guarding their flocks on the humble hills of Bethlehem; and of how the grown-up angels were to go with the shepherds, leading them to the place where the Little

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Christ and his Mother would be found, that they might worship Him.

The little angels all sat about near the older angels, or stood beside them, very eager and attentive, listening to what was said; for, like the little earthly children, though they did not understand very well what the older angels meant to do, yet they loved to do what those older than themselves would be doing. Therefore they gathered about them eagerly, and said:

“Oh, let us go, too!”

But the other angels shook their heads, for it was not to be thought of.

Then when the little angels begged, as earthly children do, to know why they might not have their wish, the older angels explained, gently:

“You are too little, much too little.”

Now this did not seem to the little

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angels, any more than it does to little earthly children, a very good reason.

"We would not tire," they said, eagerly. "We would not weary you," they urged. "We would be obedient. We would be very good."

But the older angels said:

"Dear little angels! You do not know whereof you speak. You are too little, much too little, and you would grow weary, for the world is a dark place, such as you have not seen, full of trouble and sorrow and suffering, such as you know not of. What would such little people as you do there?"

Then the little angels were silent, until they found what seemed to them a possible reason why they might still be allowed to go.

"But surely," they said, "there must

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be little people there also. Surely the world cannot be without little children."

"Yes," admitted the older angels, "there are little children, but they are not like you. They are little children of the earth, and for that reason they are very used to suffering. The waters by which they play, though they frequently shine in the sun like this shining river, are often dark and stormy, and the songs that the waters sing are sometimes songs of woe. The trees beneath which the little children yonder play have whispering leaves, it is true, even as the tree ye play under; and their fruits are crimson and purple and gold, even as these ye stretch your hands to touch. But there comes a season when the wind blows chill and bleak upon the earth, a time when it shakes the trees and strips them of their leaves, and their fruits are

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no more, and the birds' songs are lost and gone—things only to be remembered. And because of these things the little earth children are accustomed to loss, as ye are not, my dears. There, too, on the earth, there are flowers, of a most heavenly beauty, but upon the stems of the most lovely, as well as upon many a tree and vine, are thorns. And often the little earth children tear their hands upon these thorns. Sometimes, also, they fall and hurt themselves upon the earth's stony roads. Sometimes their parents forget them, so that they must go hungry; or at times the older ones do not love them, and then the little children are sad and sorrowful. It is indeed no place for little heavenly angels. Here in the happy harbor of God's saints, here on this sweet and pleasant soil ye are safe and well be-

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loved. Be content, dear little angels, be content to stay."

But though the little angels listened soberly, and though they knew that the older angels loved them and were wise, yet they were by no means convinced. After all, had they not heard it said that the Little Lord himself was going to dwell upon the earth? And if He could sojourn there, then why not they? Nevertheless, though they were certainly not persuaded by what the older angels told them, yet they made an effort to be content. They tuned their little zitherns and zitoles and mandolins and flutes; and they sang softly their little heavenly songs, and tried to be happy.

But try as they would, yet the thought would come back again and again, like the haunting refrain of a little pleading

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air that will not be put by: "The other angels are going! Then why not we?" And the more thoughtful among them reasoned wistfully: "If they are needed to waken the shepherds, might there not be something that we also could do—some small service which, little though we are, we might render?"

So they thought and wished, and played and paused in their playing to wish again. But all this was among themselves, and they said nothing of it to the older angels, for they did not wish to trouble those who were always so kind to them.

By and by the day came for the older angels to fare forth upon their earthly mission. There were among them those of a wondrous beauty; all those, indeed, of a most luminous loveliness, whom the little angels most loved and would

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most miss. There was, for instance, leading the others somewhat, the Angel of the Annunciation, in whose hand was the lily they liked so well. There were, moreover, those other angels whose silver-sounding names were dear to the ears of the little angels, chiming like bells of a most peculiar sweetness, as you will admit yourself if you say them over softly—*Raphael, Gabriel, Israfel, Sandalphon, Michael, and Azrael.*

The little angels were grouped by the shining ramparts of God's House to watch the older angels go; and presently these came, the council of their rainbow wings and gleaming feet making as it were a loveliness, a harmony, even as if it were a living madrigal. And the little angels waved to them, and watched them move away on their long journey through the blue. And as they went,

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beautiful and many, it was like the moving of a star ship, stately and beautiful, with heavenly music rising from it, that most lovely angel with the lily being its prow.

And as long as the little angels could see the light of the stars of which that ship was made one body, they waved their hands to it; and when they could see it no more, they waved yet a little while, from mere love and remembrance, and then took up their little instruments, to play upon them and to find comfort in music, which brings comfort to so many.

Now you will remember that no one had really forbidden the little angels to go where the older angels had gone; the older angels had but advised them that the earth would be a hard place for little feet and a place of sorrow for hearts so

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young as theirs. Therefore, when the others had departed, and had been gone a little while, a great longing to go to see the Little Lord came once again upon the little angels.

So one of them laid down his zithern at last, and said:

“If only we also might go and find Him? He is little, like ourselves.”

Still another, lifting his fingers from off his flute, said, soberly:

“If He can go who, though He is Lord of Heaven, is yet so little and helpless, why may not we?”

A third also, hushing the music of his zithern, spoke thoughtfully:

“May it not be that thorns will tear *His* hands also? May *He* not fall and hurt himself most likely? Who knows but that there *He* also might go hungry?”

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At this the others crowded close, hushing their flutes and lutes and stilling all their music, a little band of thoughtful, sober angels, reflecting and communing, and all of one mind.

"If this be so," said they, "why, then, should we be here? Oh, come. Let us rather be there to keep Him company; to play to Him on our zitherns and zitoles, and to be merry lest *He* should be sad."

Then between themselves, they took counsel and it was found that they were all agreed; nor did there seem to them any reason for delay. So, without taking counsel of any, and when no one was aware, a band of them left heaven even as the older angels had done. But their leaving was, as you can see, a far different matter, and theirs was a light frigate indeed to go upon so large a starry sea. Yet fear was not with them,

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neither knew they any dismay. And as they went, one, more thoughtful than the rest, was heard to say:

“But where shall we go and what is our direction?”

And the one who had first suggested going announced:

“To the hills of Bethlehem. It was of them the other angels spoke.”





"O H," said the little angels, hastening, and not noting how cold the heath was, "let us make haste to free this little young lamb; for even so, even so, the Little Lord might be caught among thorns. This is the sorrow of which the older angels told us."



II

"As sheep not having a shepherd"

WHEN the little angels came at last to the hills of Bethlehem, they had not thought to find them dark. They expected, indeed, to find them bright and shining, and they never thought but to find the Little Lord walking the hills in glory.

But, lo, the hills were bare and bleak, and there was no light or glory upon them save the uncertain light of stars, which seemed to the little angels but dim and inconsiderable.

As they stood wondering, they noticed

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that over the bleak hills a little cold wind ran, bending back the bushes, searching and feeling with its chill fingers as though trying to find something; then on again, chill and mysterious to other bushes, bending them back also. And it ran up to each of the little angels and felt their faces and their delicate bodies and their wings with its cold touch as one blindfolded, in a game, seeks to know who it is his hands hold. But the wind knew them not nor could identify them for any little children that it had ever known, then it went on again, and left them, and because of its touch they felt chill and strange and alone.

They looked all about, but their friends the older angels were nowhere to be seen. Neither were there any shepherds.

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And as they stood wondering, each remembered what the older angels had said concerning the world; and though not one among them would have turned back, yet hardly one among them but remembered the shining ramparts of God's House, and the Tree of Life, and the sweet and flowing Waters of Life; and even as they recalled these, they thought of what the other angels had told them about the earth, how there were thorns in it and roads that were stony, and how there were difficulty and sorrow. But these are things that one must experience to understand. After all, they had greatly wished to come to the hills of Bethlehem, and these were those hills all about them.

"Can it be, do you think," said one, anxiously, "that we shall not find Him?"

"Nay, surely. There will be those,

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without doubt, who will tell us where He is laid. If only we could find the shepherds, they would know. For it was to them, particularly, that the other angels were to bring the glad tidings of great joy."

But as far as they could see, the shepherds were not there. Only the little wind came back searching again, among the bushes, and ran hither and yon along the heath searching, searching for something it could not find. The hills were silent and very bare in the dim starlight. Nowhere, nowhere was the star ship of the angels to be seen, nor any vision of their rainbow wings and shining feet, nor sound of their heavenly names and voices. All about was naught but that deep shadow of the earth which men call "night," and it seemed to the little angels, used as they were to so much

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glory, that the shadow was very deep, and only dimly, dimly lighted by the stars.

But even as they stood there wondering, out of the darkness there came the prolonged sound of the most pitiful bleating of little lambs, such a sorrowful sound it was as had never yet fallen upon the ears of the little angels.

Then one held up a sudden tiny finger, and they all harkened, their eyes full of wonder, till at last one of them said, in a hushed whisper:

"It is, no doubt, the sorrow the other angels told us about. Let us see if we can find this little creature, to comfort it; for in this manner also sorrow might come to the Little Lord."

Then they all went seeking among the rocks, following the sound, that they might find it. And the sound led them

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straight to a thicket where a young lamb was caught among thorns. About it stood other little lambs, crying and bleating with sorrowful voices, until you would have been moved to pity. But nothing made answer to their crying, nor were there any animals older and more experienced near by to hear them.

"Oh," said the little angels, hastening, and not noting how cold the heath was, "let us make haste to free this little young lamb; for even so, even so, the Little Lord might be caught among thorns. This is the sorrow of which the older angels told us."

So they crowded together, and some of them got down on their knees, and by dint of much effort, and pulling and tugging and soft coaxings and much comforting, they succeeded in getting

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the little, soft, woolly thing free at last. It is true their own little hands were cruelly cut by thorns; but they did not notice it very much, nor did they mourn much because of it; for the little lamb was so delighted to be free, and all its little lamb companions, who had stood about crying, so helpless, were so happy and so comforted. Not but that they were a little frightened still, so that the little angels led them to a more sheltered place and made them lie close together to get warm, and shielded them as best they could from the inquisitive wind, and hushed them and bade them not to fear. And some of the little angels would stroke the soft, gentle faces, and some would lay their hands upon the soft, woolly heads, patting them until you have no idea how comforted the little, frightened creatures were.

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Being comforted they said in soft, bleating voices:

"We are those who were too little. It was because of this that we could not follow the shepherds to Bethlehem to see the Little Lord."

Hearing this, the little angels understood very well, and said among themselves:

"We are little, too; and we know very well what it is to be left behind. We must on no account leave them."

So, although the little angels longed to be up and on the road to Bethlehem, they stayed with the lambs instead, comforting them as best they could; and indeed the lambs had never been so comforted before. One little angel played upon the pipe, and the music was like that of a little wind that has strayed from heaven and is always kind; and

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another played softly upon a tiny horn uplifted like a flower whose perfume speaks; and one upon a harp, and his music was like the sound of raindrops that have learned to say many things that lie hid in the heart of the rain. And others of the little angels told the little creatures about the pastures of the blessed, all clothed in living green, where they might gambol as gay as they pleased, without a fear; and about the still waters that refresh and restore the soul, and about the paths of righteousness for His name's sake, and of a rod and a staff to comfort them. And others stroked the woolly fleece of the little gentle folk and called them "the little lambs of God."

And so the little lambs were comforted and their hearts beat quiet again; and some of them even went to sleep—yes,

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and to dream of the green pastures of which they had just been told. So they dreamed, with the arms of the little angels close about them, and the heads of the little angels laid over lovingly against theirs.

The time passed on. The little angels stayed as they were, with the sleeping lambs, who had now wholly forgotten their sorrows. And as they stayed there quietly they thought of the older angels, and could not help wondering where now these were; nor could they help wishing that they too might be in Bethlehem to wait upon the Little Lord and to serve Him. Not, mind you, that they would have left the little lambs, lest these might once again have fallen to sorrowing.

I do not know how long they remained there; but I think it seemed a long time

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before they heard voices, and then saw coming up over the hills men in sheep-skin coats and carrying tall shepherds' crooks.

The little angels sat up and peered through the dim starlight, and they could see that the men's faces shone as with some reflected glory, and their voices were full of wonder as they spoke of what they had seen. Surely, indeed, these were the shepherds, and surely these had been to worship the Little Lord. Just then one of them spoke words that were full of meaning:

"He shall be called Wonderful," said he, "and the Prince of Peace."

And another answered:

"Yes. Heard ye not what was said concerning Him by the heavenly choir? 'He shall feed His flock like a shepherd. He shall gather the lambs with his

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arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.'"

And still another said:

"Heard ye not also, the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose?"

So the shepherds talked with eager voices as they came; and as they heard these things, the little angels said among themselves:

"This is He of whom it is told. Surely, the shepherds have returned; and they have seen our brothers the other angels and the Little Lord. Now may we depart also to Bethlehem to find Him, and to play to Him a sweet music."

Then they slipped away, delighted and skipping, light as thistle-down, along the

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heath. And the shepherds, as they went again among their flocks, said:

“Lo, no harm has come even to the littlest ones. Surely the Lord and the Lord’s ministers are with us.”

The little angels were glad that they had stayed; yet glad enough they were, too, that they were once more free to go to Bethlehem to seek the Little Lord. So, unseen by the shepherds, they went down over the hills to the road that led to Bethlehem. And so glad were they that as they went, for very gladness, they played a sweet music on their little heavenly instruments. The wind, searching no longer now restlessly, but gentle rather and content, took up the music, as though it had found at last that which satisfied it, and it carried the lovely departing sound of it up and over the hills of Bethlehem to where the

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shepherds were once more abiding in the fields and keeping watch over their flocks. And the shepherds, not knowing what it was, said:

“How wondrous sweet is the air! It is a holy night. The Little Lord is born.”





*SOME of the little
angels swayed the
pine boughs very, very gently,
rocking the nests. Some sang
little bird lullabies. Some took
the tiniest birds up in their arms and
cuddled and warmed them, or shook loving
fingers at them, bidding them be quiet.*



III

"Not a sparrow falleth to the ground"

THE road was rough for little feet used only to the streets of gold and the pastures of the blessed. There were sharp stones that bruised or cut; sometimes there were briars or thorns that hurt and detained. From time to time the road climbed cruelly up steep hillsides, or ran abruptly down steep valleys or wandered whimsically into rough and dark places. It was a road with little pity for those who went with it.

Nevertheless, the little angels toiled on bravely. Some of them, as they went,

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remembered in their hearts the Tree of Life and the Shining Waters and the everlasting pastures. Here the trees were bleak and bare, and the pastures at either side of the road were somber and rolling like an unlighted sea. A dark place indeed! This was the earth, even as the older angels had told them and warned them of it.

Sometimes one would stumble and fall, and others would help him up, and perhaps one would say:

“Let us not be troubled. If these are the roads the Little Heavenly Lord must travel, then why not we?”

And so the one who was hurt would grow happy again with the hope of some day comforting the Little Lord; and the rest would play upon their little instruments as they went, until the whole night was sweet.

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Surely before long they must come to Bethlehem, and there they would find the Little Lord, and at this thought some of them would take little skipping steps for gladness.

In this manner it was that they went on and on, weary yet very eager. Then suddenly one of them raised a tiny sudden forefinger and whispered, "Hark!" and the rest all stopped to listen.

Beside the road at the place where they stood was a tall pine forest; and from the tall pines there came now the sound of the most pitiful crying of little voices.

"Oh!" said one of the little angels, clasping his hands, "who are these that cry?"

Then said another, peering up through the dark branches:

"It is the little baby feathered folk.

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And, oh, they are very, very little, littler than the lambs. Hear how they cry from their nests. Who could have left them so to mourn?"

And another said:

"This also, no doubt, is the sorrow of which our brothers told us."

There in the nests in the wide branches were little, little birds; and these, lonely and hungry and afraid and chilled in the night, were crying, crying.

For it seems that there in the pine forest a wonderful thing had happened. Have you seen at night, when a light streams suddenly from a window into a near-by tree, have you seen a sleeping bird awake believing it is day, and have you heard it sing in the mid of the night a stave of daytime song? Even so, it seems, roused by the glory which shone about the heavenly host, the very birds

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of the midnight trees had wakened, as though it had been dawn; and hearing the angels' song, and their tidings of great joy, they had left their nests to follow the glory and the singing of the angels, that they too might present themselves and their adoring songs at the feet of the Little Lord where He lay in Bethlehem. But the wings of the little young birds were too weak to follow, and it was they now, chilled and afraid, who were crying.

Then one of the little angels said:

"Yes, surely this must be the sorrow of which the other angels told us. Who knows! Even so our Little Lord may sometimes be left lonely and afraid, as are these little birds. Let us stay and comfort them."

Then the others agreed; and they all stayed their journey to comfort the

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little birds. Some of the little angels swayed the pine boughs very, very gently, rocking the nests. Some sang little bird lullabies. Some took the tiniest birds up in their arms and cuddled and warmed them, or shook loving fingers at them, bidding them be quiet. Others found threads that the parent birds had woven in the nests, and made "cat-cradles" to take the little birds' minds off their troubles. Still others smoothed the ruffled plumage and stroked the little downy heads, or said quaint little rhymes to the wee birds' toes, such as are said to little wee children, to comfort them and to make them forget:

*"This little bird went a-flying,
This little bird stayed home.
This little bird had grain of millet seed,
This little bird had none."*

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And at this the little wee birds would stare amazedly at their toes, then at the little angels, then back again delightedly at their toes, forgetting all their troubles, and not remembering that they had ever been afraid.

Then, moreover, all the while, some of the little angels played upon their little instruments, delicate music very well suited to little birds and very soothing to the ear; for the notes of their lutes and their zitherns were very like the twitter of waking birds in the morning, only a hundred times more sweet; and the sounds of the flutes and the oboes were like the call of the thrushes from the forest trees when the sun stands in the gates of the west, were the gates of the west the gates of heaven, and were the tree from which they sang the Tree of Life by the Living Waters.

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With all this, then, the little birds were quite delighted; so that they fluffed their feathers and settled down in them very comfortably, and put back their heads and twittered their beaks contentedly, and, with little, soft chirpings, closed their eyes and were asleep.

Now the little angels were so eager to be up and away to Bethlehem that it almost seemed to them they might leave the little birds, now that they were all safely asleep. But they bethought them that the little creatures might wake again, after all, and, finding none to care for them, might again be lonely and afraid. So they remained with them.

I do not know how long it was before they heard a soft, soft whirring in the air, and the voices of many, many birds. For the parent birds were flocking back,

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and as they came they spoke together of the wonderful things they had seen in Bethlehem.

“He shall have a care of the sparrow’s fall,” they said, wondering. “And though we gather not into barns, our Heavenly Father shall feed us, He shall know the paths of the fowls of the air.” So, and with such simple gossip, and viewing the wonderful happenings of that night from their own standpoint, they came flying back, flying back to the trees they had left.

Meanwhile, the little angels had kissed the fluffy heads of the little sleeping birds, and the little birds had begun to dream of a land where it is always the break of day, and where eternal cherries hang upon the trees, and where the nightingale sings always in the topmost boughs, and where one could fly beyond

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the gates of the morning without ever the tiring of a wing.

Seeing that the mother birds were returned once more, and while the baby birds dreamed of these delightful things, the little angels slipped away into the shadows unseen.

Then the parent birds looked at their young, and, finding them asleep happily, they wondered and rejoiced.

"No harm has come even to the littlest ones!" they said, peering into the nests with careful concern. "How contented they sleep! and they have not even waked!"

Then be sure the little angels were very glad they had stayed. But, oh, they were glad, too, to depart, they, who had been so eager and who had been so long, so long delayed.

"Now," said they, "now that the

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little lambs and the little birds are comforted, we too will go on to Bethlehem; and there we shall find our dear, dear brothers, the other angels. How surprised they will be, and how amazed and pleased to see us. And there we shall find our Little Lord at last."

So, from the tips of the swaying branches, they slipped down to the solid earth once more, down to the road, which, though it was a dark road, and rough to their little unaccustomed feet, was a beloved road to them, nevertheless, because they knew it would lead them to Bethlehem. And as they went, some of them took little skipping steps for very joy, while others played a most sweet music.

The older birds, not knowing what this music was, said among themselves:

"How sweet the wind speaks to-

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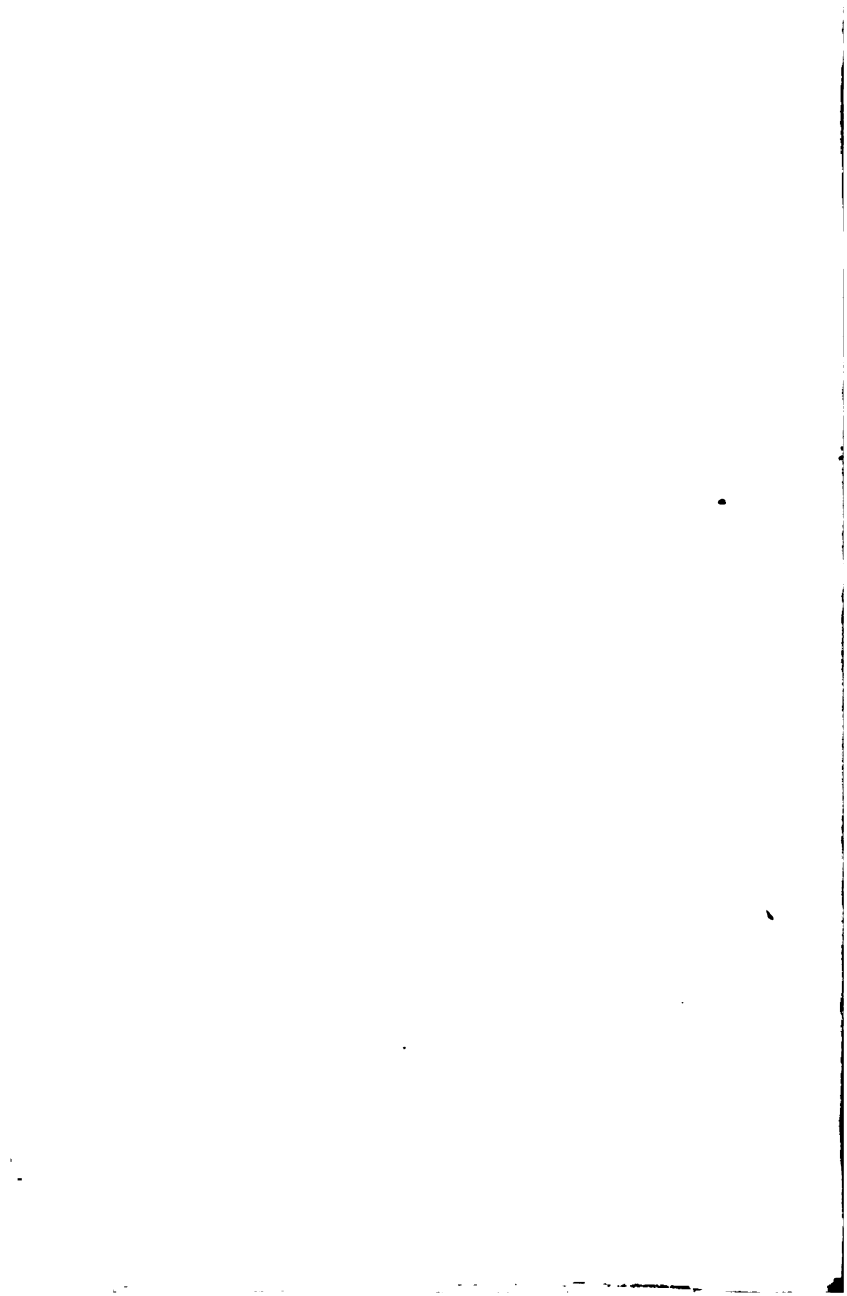
night!—sweeter than ever in the world before! The Little Lord is born, my brothers!"

But the baby birds in their fluffed feathers were sure in their dreams they heard the immortal nightingale.





THEN one got a
plantain leaf and
fanned it to and fro
gently; and one ran
to the well in the starlight and fetched
water for the child; another smoothed
its brow, and yet another sat upon its
pillow and plucked the strings of a zithern
and sang to it a lullaby.



IV

"And kings to the brightness of thy rising"

ON and on the little angels traveled on the road to Bethlehem, free now to seek the Little Lord. But glad though they were at that thought, they were yet tired and chilled. The road was rough. The night wind blew cold. And though they kept a brave air, yet from time to time their hearts were filled with doubts and fears; and even the stoutest and bravest longed to find their brothers the other angels, and to rest under the wide shelter of their wings.

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"Should we not hasten?" said one.

"Might we not be late?" said another.

"What if we should miss them altogether?" said a third.

At this they huddled and hurried a little faster, their delicate feet picking the way flinchingly among the cold stones.

And one said.

"It were a pity to miss them, for we have come so far."

And another said, taking little, troubled, skipping steps to keep up with the others:

"Surely, surely it cannot be much farther, for the shepherds and the birds have been and returned."

"That is true," said another, taking heart.

"But the shepherds and the birds

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knew the way," suggested a third, "and to know the way shortens the journey."

So among themselves they spoke the little doubts or hopes that were in their hearts.

"If the other angels did but know we were coming, they would surely wait for us."

"Yes, if only they knew."

"Perhaps some one will have told them."

"But who?"

"I do not know. We have seen no one but the shepherds and the birds."

"Even though we should miss the other angels altogether, yet the Little Lord will surely be there," said one, cheerfully. "For He was not to return to heaven. He was to remain in the world."

"Yes, precisely," said another. "But

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that is why we must not linger. For it is we who are to comfort Him."

"Yes, even now He may have need of us," said one.

"Even now! What if He, the Little Lamb of the World, were caught in cruel thorns, and had need of us to free Him?"

"Hurry! hurry!" said the rest.

"And may not He who is little and tender and unused to the world's rough roads—may not He have dashed His foot against a stone—He also?"

"Oh, let us hurry!" said the others.

"And here in the world where such strange and sad things can happen, who knows but He, the Little Bird of God, may be lonely in His nest; may be hungry perhaps and chill? Who knows, since He has come to a world where such things happen?"

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"Oh, hurry!" said the rest. "Let us not linger."

And they took little, hurried, skipping steps, their tender feet flinching among the rough stones. Their little, heavenly faces were very sober with earnest intent now, for it was they who knew from their own experience the world's ways and it was they who meant to bring comfort to the Little Lord.

So they hurried on, hurried on. Only the music of their little heavenly voices sounded now; the time was too short and their purpose too serious to allow their lips and delicate fingers to converse with lute and flute, to talk with harp or oboe, zithern or zithle.

At last the dark hills began to withdraw in a slow and grand and kingly manner. Along the plain, humble houses could be seen, and as the road

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fared on these became more friendly, as it were people drawing nearer to one another, until here and there they stood side by side or leaned close each to the other, like those who gossip and share news.

News of human doings! News of other folk! Who does not like to hear it! So at last more houses were gathered to listen, and stood about quiet and attentive in the night, lining the road at either side, and waiting, close together now, for whatever news the adventurous road might bring. Let hills keep kingly silence if they choose; this is the usual behavior of nobles; but houses, like the common people, prefer to crowd together and to feel and hear the press of human happenings.

And as the night and the houses looked down upon the road which had

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become now a street on the outskirts of the City of David, they beheld something new indeed—a company of little angels, very sober, very much in earnest, and tired, yet hurrying.

But just then a strange sound fell upon the night, and upon the ears of the little angels. The foremost of these put up a sudden forefinger and the rest all stopped to listen. There were strange voices. There were voices and the padded sound of soft hoofs, and a swaying and stirring, and the soft moving sound of a caravan in the night.

What indeed was this?

“Is it, do you think, some new sorrow?” said one of the little angels.

Another answered:

“We must wait and see.”

So they stood unseen in the hawthorn's shade, and in the shadow of a

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Rose of Sharon, where these grew by the roadside, and waited.

Presently, under the mysterious light of a star, there came into sight the caravan.

In the fore of it were patient, gentle-eyed, soft-footed camels. These carried bales and burdens, heaped up darkly upon them, as though they might have come from a distant land. Beside them and at their heads walked the camel-drivers in tunics. They wore turbans above their strange, dark faces, and their eyes looked out as it were from far countries.

Behind the camel-drivers came men in long cloaks bearing other burdens and staves, and behind these many more dressed in yellow and strange dark stripes, and wearing the garb of servants. Then followed asses, laden also; then

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more camels; and at last three camels, taller, more gentle-eyed, more soft-footed than the rest. These wore, falling at their sides, rich red and purple and blue cloths embroidered with gold and scarlet. And upon these three camels there rode three kings. They were clad in purple, and in gold also, and in rich fabrics like the cloths of Tyre and Sidon. Each wore upon his breast jewels of great price.

The hair of one of the kings was white, so also was his beard, and wisdom looked out from his eyes, and his body swayed with the slow swaying of the camel that he rode. This king was Caspar. And the hair and beard of the second king were brown, and kindness looked out from his eyes, and his body also swayed with the slow swaying of the camel that carried him. This king was Balthazar.

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And the hair and beard of the third king were like the shadow of trees in starlight, and his face was dark like the face of the night; and longing looked out from his eyes, and his body, even as the others, swayed with the slow swaying of the camel that bore him. This king was Melchior.

And in his hands, and held before him as though it were something that was precious, each king bore a costly gift: Caspar, a carved coffer full of treasured gold; Balthazar, a chest inlaid which contained jewels; but Melchior, in his dark hands, a finely wrought box of carven alabaster, inclosing frankincense and myrrh.

And the three kings as they rode had their eyes fixed ahead of them, and their faces were lighted up with wisdom and expectancy.

"See," said he whose gift was gold,

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"the star hath stood still yonder. It can now be but a little way."

And the one whose gift was jewels replied:

"Yes, soon shall we lay our gifts down before Him."

And the one whose gift was frankincense and myrrh said:

"Oh, my heart! the long journey is well nigh at an end, and these eyes shall behold the Son of God."

Then you cannot think how glad the little angels were.

"These surely seek the Lord," they said. "We have only to follow in their train and we also shall come to His abiding-place. There we shall find our brothers, the older angels, and when we have sung our songs to the Little Lord, and it is time to depart, with them we shall go home."

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For the thought of home was with the little angels now as with those who are in exile; and seeing kings who brought gifts to their Little Master, they were for the time forgetful of their own errand, forgetful that they had come to serve Him, lest He should be in need of comforting.

They fell in eagerly with the caravan, unnoticed. And tired and footsore though they were, yet here and there were some of them who sang. But only the camels heard, and paused and turned their heads slowly to listen, so that the camel-drivers urged them on, saying:

“What! would you linger now! now that we are so near the end of the journey!”

So the camels went on again gently, and the little angels said among themselves:

The Little Angels

"You heard what the camel-drivers said? We are almost there! almost there!"

Meantime the houses, like gossiping neighbors, stood closer still, some crowding and looking over the shoulders of the others; and the road was hard and smooth and even, and had become the much-traveled street of a city. The soft hoofs of the camels, the feet of the men, made a subdued noise in the night, and mingled with it was the sound of voices. In the midst of the caravan rode the three kings, silent now, holding their gifts with careful and adoring hands, their faces lighted by the strange light of the star, which went ahead of them, as it were a messenger to guide them.

Then from house to house, first here, then there, was a wonder and a stirring

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and an opening of doors, and men and women looked out. What was this strange happening in the night? What wonderful and unwonted thing had the adventurous road brought them now? What new thing was this? Seeing the caravan and the star and the three kings, they ran back hastily, took up their cloaks and threw them about their shoulders, and hurried into the street to join those whom they saw following the soft-footed camels.

Presently from several of the deserted houses the little angels could hear the sound of a most pitiful weeping; not like the lambs, not like the birds, for it was something even more heart-touching than the cries of these.

Then one of them held up a sudden forefinger, hushing the rest, and they all stood still, very still, and listened.

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And they remembered about the little lambs and about the little birds, and they remembered also what they themselves had suffered.

"This is more of the sorrow that the other angels told us of," said one, softly.

"Even in this same manner, the Little Lord may some day be sorrowing and in need," said another.

"Oh, let us stay and comfort them," said a third.

So they entered the deserted houses, and the caravan went on without them, not knowing, for none but the camels had seen that the little angels were there.

In the dark of the deserted houses, lying in their beds and cradles, were little children, alone and frightened and crying in the night. Over these the little angels bent. They rocked the rude cradles; they sang to the little

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children; they whispered soft, comforting things in the ears of the littlest ones; or they played little gay or comforting or talking tunes on their pipes and zitherns and zitoles, till the little babies stopped crying suddenly and stared straight ahead of them in pleased amazement, as you have seen babies do, and then smiled suddenly and broadly, or even laughed as though something delightful and amusing had dawned on them. Or some of them who had cried the loudest lay hushed now and staring up at the dark as though they liked it, and making little cooing, gurgling sounds as a means of expressing their content. Some of them at last, tired, even, it seemed, of being so delightfully comforted, began drooping heavy eyelids, raised them and drooped them—raised them and drooped them—

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and drooped them—and drooped them, nodding, and fell asleep at last, as babies will, in all sorts of queer positions, leaning over heavily, most of them, against the little angels.

It would not do, therefore, for the little angels to move, for then the babies might waken, nor did they feel that they could on any account leave these tiny folk alone, now that they had comforted them; so they remained as they were, some with their arms about the children, and some half supporting the little drowsy bodies.

So the night wore on. The little angels began to be very tired, very tired indeed. There was not one of them all who would have left the little children comfortless; no, but neither was there one of them who did not think longingly of the three kings and the caravan.

Perhaps the little angels themselves

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might have slept a little and taken a brief time to dream of the shining waters flowing by the Tree of Life, and so might have rested their hearts awhile; but there was one little child who was sick and whom they could not comfort. They sang to it and played to it and murmured to it of little lovely, heavenly things, but still it moaned.

Then one got a plantain leaf and fanned it to and fro gently; and one ran to the well in the starlight and fetched water; another smoothed its brow, and yet another sat upon its pillow and plucked the strings of a zithern and sang to it a lullaby such as its mother might have sung, only sweeter:

*“Hush, my child, lie still and slumber,
Holy angels guard thy bed;
Heavenly blessings without number
Gently falling on thy head.”*

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*"Hush, my child, bright streams all shining
By the bending heavenly trees,
Flow eternal;—cease repining,
Sleep, my dear, and dream of these.*

*"In heaven's fields the birds are chanting,
Nightingale and thrush and lark;
There no shadows slowly slanting,
Bring the night; 'tis never dark.*

*"There tall angels move in measure,
Michael, Rafael, Israfel,
And 'twould be their heavenly pleasure,
Oh, my dear, to love thee well.*

*"We who know, we would conduct thee
Where hang heavenly flowers and
fruit,
And kind Rafael would instruct thee
In the playing of the lute.*

*"Gabriel, bending o'er his zither,
Soon would teach thy baby feet
Lovely steps, now hither, thither—
Motion matched to music sweet.*

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*"Many a game and heavenly story,
Many a woven dance and song,
There upon the shore of glory
Would beguile the day, heaven-long.*

*"There the Little Lord with dancing
Passes many an hour away;
Sleep, and in thy dreams advancing,
Thou shalt join Him in His play."*

So, and to the melody of this singing, the little child slept at last and dreamed of heavenly things, and the little angels were glad to think they had soothed its sorrow. Then, hardly had it fallen asleep when there was the sound of returning footsteps and of mingled voices, as of people who spoke wonderingly and eagerly of what they had seen.

"Have ye not known? Have ye not heard? Hath it not been told unto you from the beginning?" said one, remem-

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bering the prophecies. "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation."

"Unto us a child is born," said another; "unto us a son is given, and his name shall be called Wonderful and the Prince of Peace."

"Yes," said another, clasping her hands softly, "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the calf and the young lion shall lie down together, and a little child shall lead them."

Then the doors were opened cautiously, and the fathers and mothers of the children came in.

The little angels slipped down softly from the cradles and beds, and shrank away, groups of them, into the shadows.

But there was little danger that the mothers would see them, for these thought of nothing but the little children

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they had left; and they tiptoed straight to the cradles and leaned over them, and looked searchingly at the sleeping children.

"They have not so much as wakened," said one, in a voice that was soft and thankful. "Not even the littlest ones! It is a holy and blessed night. The Little Lord Christ is born."

And the other mothers said likewise, looking with amazement at the sleeping children.

Now that they were free to go, the little angels slipped out into the deserted starlit street once more. Their instruments hung silent by their sides. It seemed they were either too tired or too sobered, I cannot tell you which, to play. It was a difficult world, just as the other angels had told them. Could they have followed the caravan all

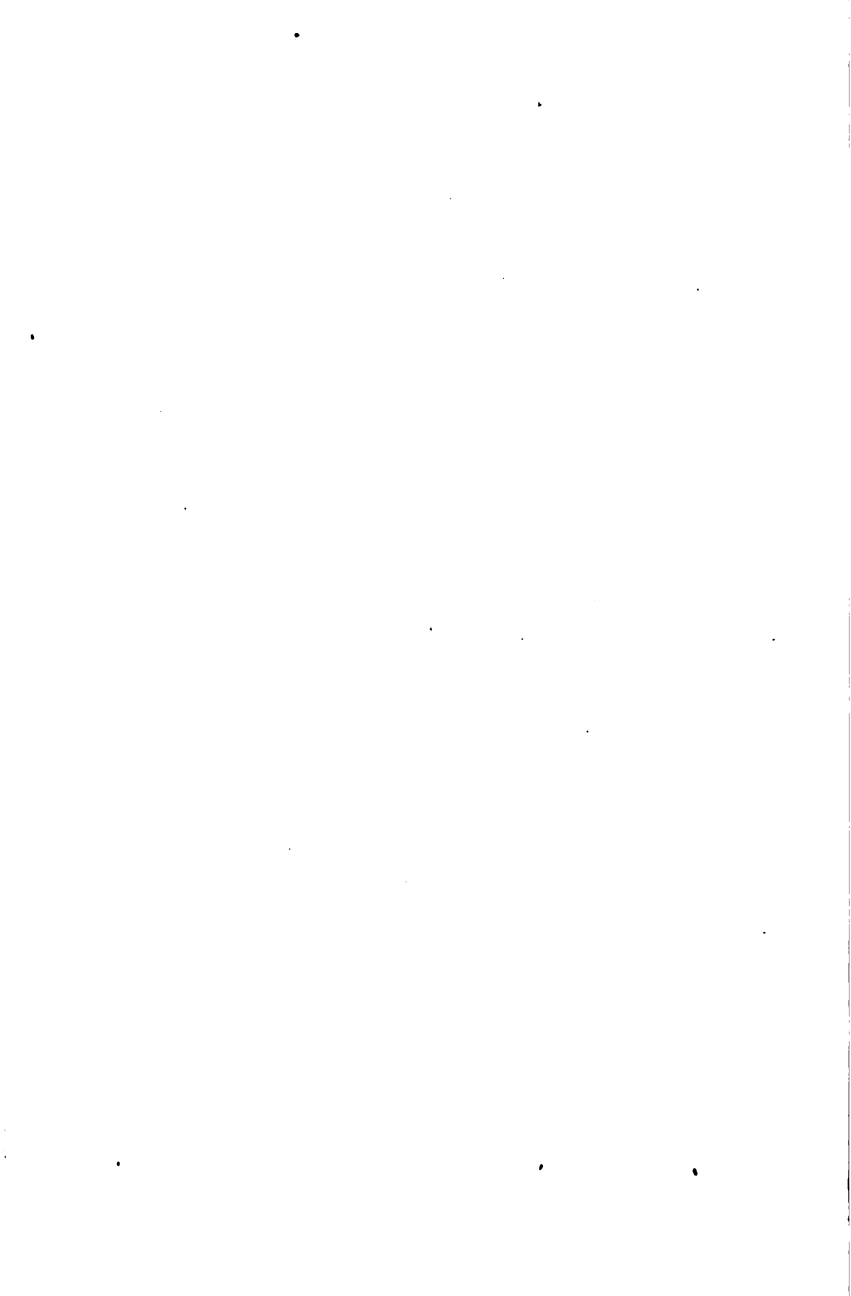
The Little Angels

might have been well. But perhaps they would not find the Little Lord, after all, now; for the night had grown late, and who would tell them where to seek Him?





THE doorway was wide. Over to it they went, one of them limping a little, and the one who had hurt his foot leaning on the shoulder of another, a very tired, dejected company of little angels. They crowded somewhat and leaned forward and peered in at the partially open door.



V

"As ye have done it unto the least of these"

I DO not know just how far they had gone, but it was quite a distance and with a good many stumblings, when one of them sat down by the wayside, and put his head in his hands and wept softly.

"I can go no farther," he said.

The others crowded around. They were weary also, and they understood, and among themselves they talked:

"The way is longer than I thought," said one.

"The stones have cut my feet," said another.

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"I have been weary a long while," said a third, "but I did not wish to discourage the others."

"It might have been very different had we not been so often detained."

"Yes, but surely we could not have left the little lambs."

"No, nor the birds."

"Nor the little children."

They were all well agreed as to that. But they were all tired, too, so tired that there was hardly one among them now who had much hope that they could carry out their plan—the plan of which they had at first felt so confident.

So they talked on, gentle and good, as little angels are, but very tired and bewildered:

"The other angels warned us."

"Yet we meant well."

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"Perhaps we should have listened to them."

"But we wanted to be of help to the Little Lord."

"Yes, but will the Little Christ ever know how much we wanted to find Him?"

So they continued to talk among themselves. The wind was beginning to blow chill. It was certain they could not go much farther; and where could they go for shelter?

Near by was a big, rough building with a low roof. Perhaps there they might find a place wherein to sleep. The doorway was wide. Over to it they went, one of them limping a little, and the one who had hurt his foot leaning on the shoulder of another, a very tired, dejected company of little angels. They crowded somewhat, and leaned forward

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and peered in at the partially open door. This was the home of cattle, for in stalls at either side they stood or lay, chewing their cuds or thinking quiet, slow thoughts of their own. Beyond at the other end of the building and resting on some straw, the little angels could see dimly a poor woman, weary also it must be, lying asleep. In her arms was a baby. At least this was a safe place, the little angels thought.

Said one of them: "Let us rest here."

"It is a warm place," said another.

"The roof is low," said yet another, peering over the shoulders of his companions, "and the door is wide."

"The breath of the cattle is sweet," said one, a little more adventurous than the rest, and stepped inside the door. Then he beckoned to the others, and,

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pointing to the woman, whispered, "She looks very kind."

"Yes," whispered another, peering also, "and the child is little, like ourselves."

So they stepped in softly, softly, one after another, carefully, on the tips of their toes, afraid of making even the tiniest sound. Just as softly as possible, and with their fingers on their lips, they slipped down in the hay in the shadows of the stalls, and, with a few whisperings among themselves, lay their heads down at last to sleep. They were, indeed, too thankful for shelter to mourn very much that they had not found the Little Lord. Once one of them sat up to take another very cautious look at the woman. What if their whisperings had wakened her! What if she should tell them they could not stay, but must be up and on again!

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But the woman continued to sleep profoundly. So the little angel lay down again and closed his eyes, and the rest closed their eyes also and slept; and, sleeping, they dreamed of all those things they loved so well—the pastures of the blessed, the nightingale and thrush forever singing; and the tall angels, Raphael, Gabriel, Israfel, Sandalphon, Michael, Azrael, moving, moving in lovely measure. And the walls of the Celestial City shone glorious in the sun, emerald and chalcedony, and beryl and chrysoprased, and jacinth and amethyst. And there the Tree of Life drooped its boughs, sapphire and splendid above the Living Waters; and beside these, playing the little heavenly games and dancing the little heavenly dances, the Little Lord they had come so far to find.

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So they slept on, unknowing and very happy, until the early dawn.

Then, just when the first light was beginning to touch and bless the doorway and windows, one of the little angels wakened, rubbed his eyes, sat up, and looked about him on this side and on that, on his little companions sleeping, at the strange, quiet place, and then at the tired woman who still slept, holding her child close in her arms, and then—and then—

He put out a little cautious hand on the wrist of the little angel nearest to him, and this one also wakened, and sat up and looked. Then they put their heads together and whispered, both of them looking sidewise, with wide eyes, to where the poor woman lay sleeping. For there upon the stable floor they saw that which indeed amazed them. They

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saw a shepherd's crook, precisely such as the shepherds had carried, and a woolen shepherd's cap, such as the shepherds had worn, and a pair of shepherd's woolen mittens, and near these were several sheep, sleeping. Moreover, spread on the floor were rich embroidered cloths, purple and scarlet and gold, exactly such as had covered the camels of the caravan; and besides these things they saw the carved coffer containing gold which had been carried by the king called Caspar; and the inlaid chest containing gems which the king called Balthazar had borne; and that finely wrought box of alabaster in which Melchior, the king with longing in his eyes, had brought the precious spices frankincense and myrrh.

At all these things they looked in amazement, then back again at each

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other. Their hearts rejoiced, you may be sure, at so wonderful a discovery, and they hastened to waken the others, pulling them softly by the elbows or shoulders and bidding them waken and look. So the others wakened, and rubbed their eyes and looked also with amaze and delight.

"This," they said, "is our Little Lord! All night we slept by Him and knew it not!"

Where now were all the weariness, all the discouragement of the day before! Gone like the mists of night before the rising sun. Not any of them remembered that they had been weary—no, not even he who had said he could go no farther. They were indeed so glad, so delighted, that they got up and began dancing little lovely heavenly dances for very joy; and they clapped their

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hands for delight, but softly, softly, so as not to waken Him.

Then suddenly one of them stopped and put up a hushing forefinger. His face was very grave and full of a new thought. The others crowded close to know what it might be.

"Look," said he; "the shepherds and the Wise Men brought Him gifts, as you can see; and we, mind you, have come empty-handed. Does it not seem we should be ashamed?"

This sobered them all very much indeed; for it was of course quite true. The others had brought worshipful gifts, and the little angels had brought nothing, nothing whatever.

They talked it over very softly and sorrowfully among themselves, while the Little Lord slept on. Why had they not thought of this? What could be

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done about it? If only the other angels were there to advise them! But, no, the other angels must have sung their songs of glad tidings and departed long ago. What could they do about it?

Just then it happened that the Little Lord Himself wakened, and, turning toward them, saw them, and held out His hands to them; and they all ran, the whole little flock of them, and stood by Him or knelt before Him, forgetting for the moment everything but the joy of being with Him.

Then he said to them:

“The other angels have gone back to heaven. How does it come that you are left behind?”

Then they sat about on the straw, and hugged their knees, and told Him all that had happened; how they had come of their own will to find Him, and how

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they had been detained by the bleating of the little lambs, and the sorrowful voices of the little birds, and the crying of the little children. Then, last of all, they told Him, with sidewise sober glances at the offerings of the shepherds and the kings, how grieved they were that they had brought Him no gifts. So, once again, they were a very sober set of little angels.

At this the Little Lord smiled, and said, gently rebuking them:

“Oh, little foolish angels, do you not know that you have brought gifts better than these gifts?”

But they did not understand, nor did they see how this was possible, for they had come empty-handed, as any one could see.

Then the Little Lord explained to them:

“These gifts round about on the straw

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are precious and beautiful—the gold and jewels and spices, and the gifts of the shepherds not less precious—the staff, the mittens against the cold, and the innocent, loving sheep. Yet these, my dears, are earthly gifts, whereas you, for My sake, have brought love and pity and comfort, and these are heavenly things, and more precious by far.”

This was indeed a thing of which the little angels had not thought, but, considering what the Little Lord said, they began to be comforted. And one of them said, softly:

“How glad I am that we came.”

“Yes, so are we,” said the others, nodding soberly.

Then, as heavenly happiness and delight came back to them, they tuned their little instruments and played little heavenly tunes with so much merri-

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ment and gladness that the Little Lord, though He smiled, put His finger to His lips and said, softly:

"Hush! You must not waken my Mother."

So they hushed their music and whispered instead, and sat about in little happy groups, and planned what they would do, now that they had really found the Little Lord, for not one of them had any idea of leaving Him.

So they spoke very softly to Him among themselves.

"We will stay with you always," said one.

"Yes, and always we will serve you." said another.

"You do not know the world's hill-sides yet," said a third, "but we know them. We do indeed. And, oh, they are very bleak and bare."

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"Yes, and there are thorn-trees which cut and bruise."

"And the roads are very rough."

"There are sharp stones—very sharp stones," said he who had hurt his foot upon a stone.

"There are crying and sorrowing, and loneliness and fear," said another.

"And the little lambs get caught in the thickets, which hurt them cruelly. But, oh, Little Master, Little Lamb of God, we will protect you, and we will take away the thorns for you, and never, never will we leave you lonely."

"We will stay with you on the bleak hills."

"We will be with you on the rough roads."

"And, oh, Little Master, Little Bird of God, if ever any forget you, we will remain with you."

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"And however others may leave you, we will not depart."

"And if ever you cannot sleep, or have fear of the darkness, it is we who will bring you a cup of water, 'tis we who will sing to you."

"All this we would love to do."

"We have had much experience; we know the world."

"We could be very helpful."

"We would stay by you always, and comfort you even as we comforted the lambs and the birds and the little children."

But the Little Lord, smiling upon them, shook his head gently and said:

"Oh, my dears, this may not be. For I came not to be served, but to serve; not to be comforted, but to comfort; not to be spared suffering, but most especially to suffer, when need be, for others' sake."

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At this they all stood about with faces very sad indeed, for they had thought to do so much, and above all, they did not like to think of the Little Lord suffering.

But He, continuing to speak, gave them comfort, and made clear to them what it was He would have them do if they would indeed love and serve Him:

“So, I say unto you, go back to heaven, my dears, my very dears, and do not fret because of Me. My Father will not leave Me comfortless. And each year, when the anniversary of this time comes, then come ye too, my little heavenly doves, and bring with you the same heavenly gifts that you brought with you this time—bring love and pity and comfort, for these are heavenly things, and the world has great need of them. And all these things that so

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eagerly ye would have done for Me, do it for others, and give your gifts as ye have done this time, not to Me, but to them; for so shall ye best make plain to them why it was I came; and so shall ye most please Me. Go, now, my little beloveds! If my Mother wakened and saw you, she might be troubled."

And seeing it was His will, the little angels were not disappointed; rather, they were glad to do whatever He wished. But before they departed they insisted on running on all manner of little errands. Everything they could think of that might be helpful they did. One found a ewer and filled it with water; another ran to an inn near by and took from its kitchen a bowl of porridge; another found there a loaf of bread; another some figs and dates; and these things they brought and laid beside the

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sleeping woman. Then they stood about with their hands on their hips trying to think of something else they might do. But there seemed to be nothing more. So they took up their little heavenly instruments and sang in chorus a song so full of love and so sweet that it made the morning sweeter than any other morning had ever been, and as it were a new day shining more perfectly than any other had ever shone in the world. And, having finished, they departed very softly, with loving backward glances as they went, and waving their hands to Him in farewell, leaving Him, as He had bade them, alone with His Mother. And the little angels saw that just then His Mother wakened and folded Him to her breast.

This is the end of the story of the little

The Little Angels

angels. I have no more to tell you concerning them.

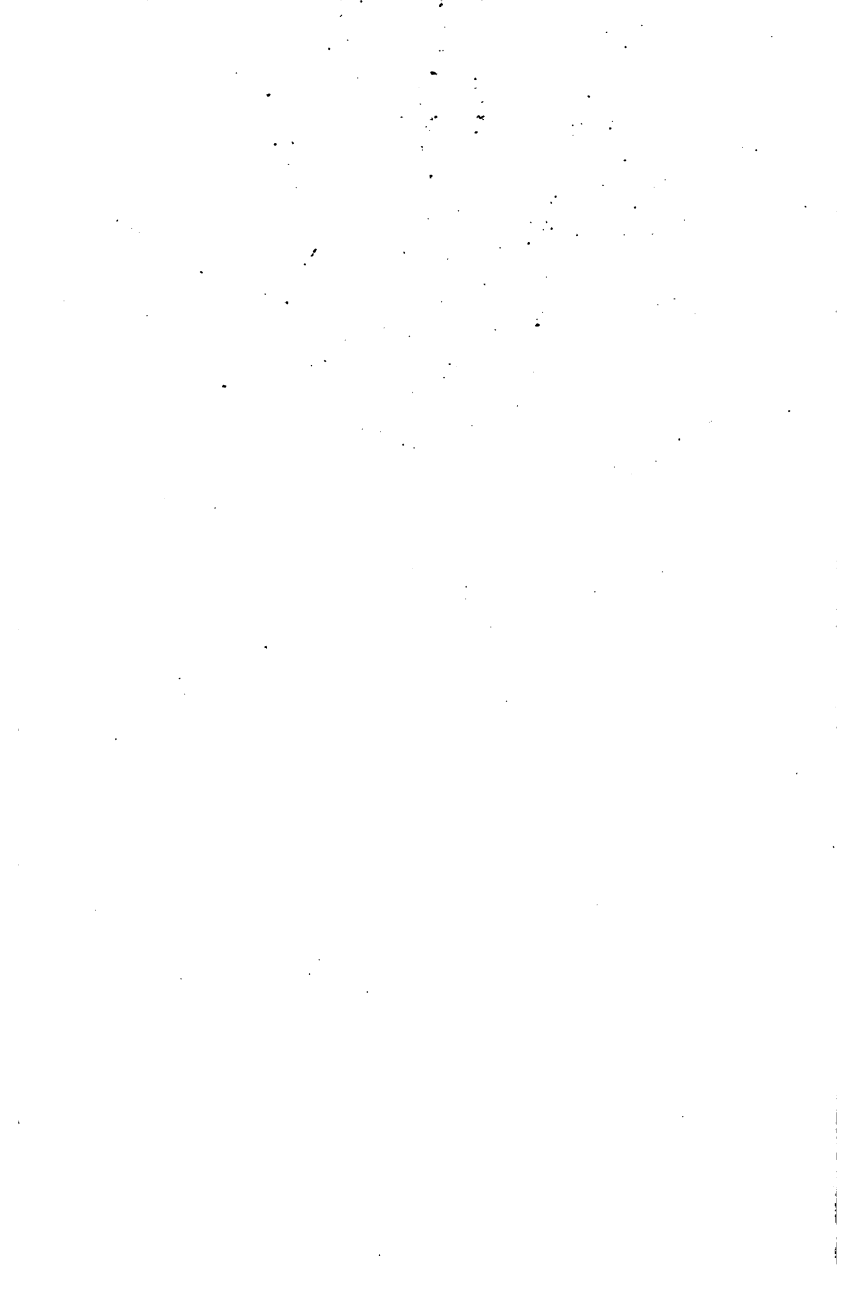
And is this story true? It was told me by a little angel who sat upon my pillow one time when I was a little child and when I was sick and suffering—a little angel with a zither who came and smoothed my pillow. But all this, you say, is only fancy, and there can be no truth in it; and at very best it can only have been a dream. But at least one thing you will admit—for you will so often have observed it—that at the blessed Christmas-time there is always more love and pity and comfort than at any other time.

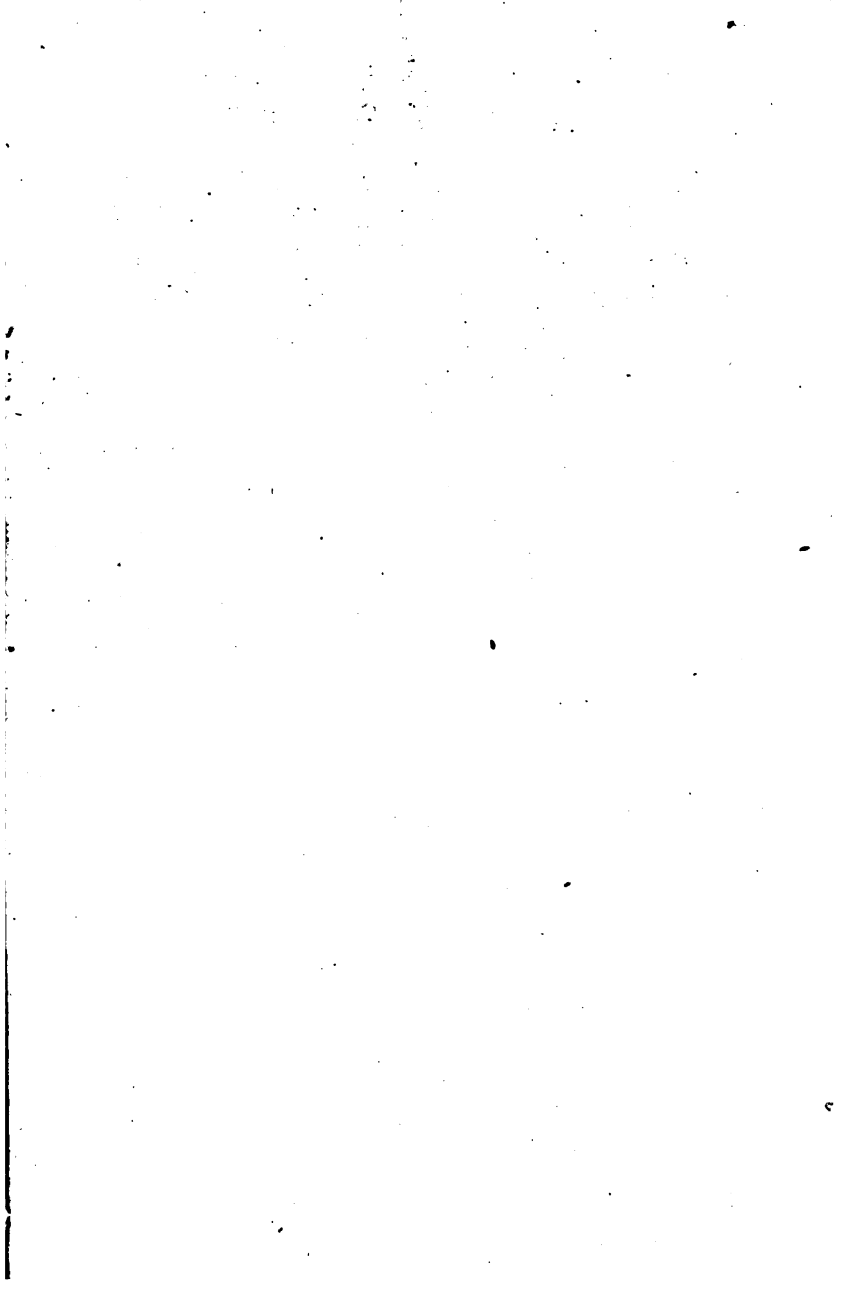
For my part, I never see a little wax Christmas angel on a Christmas tree but I think of the journey of the little angels, and I never see a crèche with the little wax figure of the Christ Child and His

The Little Angels

Mother, and the dumb beasts, and the many, many toys and gifts, some simple shepherd gifts or some made rich with the garnering of years—I never see these things without remembering that it is as the Little Christ said, "Love and pity and comfort are heavenly things—more precious than any earthly gifts by far;" and without remembering that they are of all others the gifts most pleasing to the Little Lord.







**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

[illegible]

J. M.

